



## Song of Myself

*Whitman believed that the shared identity of time and place is the greatest aspect of human connections. However, shared identity is never learned. His attitude suggests that he celebrates himself, so everybody should do the same.*

Walt Whitman  
*Leaves of Grass*  
(1855)

Parts 1-2

### 1

I celebrate myself,  
And what I **assume** you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I **loafe** and invite my soul,  
5 I **lean** and loafe at my ease observing a spear<sup>1</sup> of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,  
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,  
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,  
Hoping to **cease** not till death.

10 Creeds and schools in abeyance<sup>2</sup>,  
Retiring back a while sufficed at<sup>3</sup> what they are, but never forgotten,  
I **harbor for** good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard<sup>4</sup>,  
Nature without check<sup>5</sup> with original energy.

### 2

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,  
15 I breathe the fragrance myself, and know it and like it,  
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not **let** it.

The atmosphere is not a perfume it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless,  
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,  
I will go to the bank<sup>6</sup> by the wood and become undisguised and naked<sup>7</sup>,  
20 I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

The smoke of my own breath,  
Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers<sup>8</sup>, love-root, silk-thread, crotch and vine<sup>9</sup>,  
My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air  
through my lungs,  
25 The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and dark-color'd sea-rocks,  
and of hay in the barn<sup>10</sup>,  
The sound of the belch'd<sup>11</sup> words of my voice loos'd to the eddies<sup>12</sup> of the wind,  
A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms<sup>13</sup>,  
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag<sup>14</sup>,  
30 The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hillsides.  
The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.

1 **spear.** Lancia. *Qui:* filo.

2 **in abeyance.** In sospensiva.

3 **sufficed at.** Contento di.

4 **at every hazard.** Ad ogni costo.

5 **check.** Freno, controllo.

6 **bank.** Riva.

7 **undisguised and naked.** Palestre e nudo.

8 **ripples, buzz'd whispers.**

Mormorii, sussurri soffocati.

9 **silk-thread ... vine.** Filo di seta, biforcazione e viticcio.

10 **hay in the barn.** Fieno nel fienile.

11 **belch'd.** Urrlate.

12 **loos'd ... eddies.** Libera nei turbini.

13 **a reaching around of arms.** Un tendersi di braccia.

14 **as the supple boughs wag.** Quando oscillano i docili ramoscelli.



Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the earth much?  
Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?  
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

- 35 Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,  
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)  
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the  
dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,  
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,  
40 You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

## LITERARY COMPETENCE

### > VOCABULARY

#### 1 READ the text and match the highlighted verbs with their meaning.

- |                          |                            |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 stop .....             | 5 considered .....         |
| 2 allow .....            | 6 pass the time idly ..... |
| 3 take for granted ..... | 7 welcome .....            |
| 4 bend .....             |                            |

### > COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

#### 2 READ part one (lines 1-13) of the poem again and point out

- who the poet wants to celebrate;
- the relationship between the 'I' and the 'you';
- the poet's attitude and his aim;
- what he will leave aside;
- what he will allow to speak without restraint.

#### 3 READ part two (lines 14-31) again and do the following activities.

- 1 Identify the words referring to the settings where the poet will have his experiences. Do you feel that there are any boundaries in Whitman's world?
- 2 Say whether he will have a cognitive or physical experience and point out some details.
- 3 Find the lines where the poet
  - refers to sexual experience;
  - declares his optimistic outlook.

#### 4 READ the last part of the text (lines 32-40) again and answer the questions.

- 1 What abilities does the poet question in his addressee?
- 2 What appeal does he make? And what does he promise?

### > COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT

#### 5 COMMENT on Whitman's freedom in the use of verse. What sort of language does he use?

#### 6 FIND examples of repetition, enumeration and cataloguing in the poem.



**7 COMPLETE** the table with words and expressions referring to the senses. Then answer the question below.

Sight	Hearing	Smell	Taste	Touch

How is experience connoted?

**8 SAY** how many times does the pronoun 'I' occurs. Identify and discuss the actions connected with the speaking voice and define its attitude.

**9 DEFINE** the tone of the poem.

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➤ **COMPETENCE: PRODUCING A WRITTEN TEXT ON A GIVEN SUBJECT**

**10 WRITE** a 10/12-line paragraph to explain how the following ideas relate to *Song of Myself*:

- 1 the Emersonian idea of contact with nature as the best means to reach truth (→ 5.9);
- 2 strong individualism;
- 3 expansiveness;
- 4 the identification of the 'I' with all the things and people.

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➤ **COMPETENCE: LINKING LITERATURE TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

**11 DISCUSS.** What is your idea of freedom? Is Whitman's poem close to your feelings or not? Do you agree that first-hand experience is the best way to reach knowledge?